



At a Glance

PROJET JEUNE LEADER (PJL)

Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) is a Madagascar-based nonprofit founded in 2013 that equips adolescents with comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), life skills, and leadership training. Its school-based model integrates CSE delivery, teacher mentorship, and youth-led engagement to improve health, gender equality, and social outcomes for adolescents. PJL's work demonstrates how investing in trained young adult educators can transform schools into spaces that foster respect, equity, and empowerment.

Founding Background

PJL was founded in 2013 by Maia Ramarosandratana, who wanted to reach vulnerable youth in her hometown of Fianarantsoa, Madagascar with peer educators who led basic sexual health workshops. Through this work, she "saw how so many short-term and one-directional interventions fell short.

The youth we worked with had follow-up questions and concerns, but no one trusted to turn to." Identifying a huge need and demand for high-quality, longer-term sexual education, PJL was launched with a US \$15,000 grant, and the very first group of peer educators started working in four public schools in rural Madagascar.

Overview of Programs Offered

PJL's innovative sexuality education model is a four-year intra-curricular program designed specifically for students in grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 (ages 10–15 years), taught to boys and girls together. The program is led by highly trained and specialized young adult CSE educators, who are integrated into government middle schools to teach the multi-year curriculum during students' normal timetables. Educators strategically fill unused learning hours due to a lack of teachers and classrooms in Madagascar's education system. The educators deliver weekly interactive sessions, provide one-on-one counseling, and organize extracurricular activities that foster confidence and leadership. Complementary initiatives include partnerships with parents and school leaders to strengthen support for gender-equitable education.

Target Population

PJL's programs target adolescents aged 10–15 enrolled in public middle schools in rural areas of Madagascar. Programming is coeducational, engaging both girls and boys, while also addressing gender-specific needs and challenges related to puberty, relationships, and safety.

Relationship to Formal Systems

PJL collaborates with Madagascar's Ministry of National Education, working within rural public schools. PJL is the only organization - public or private - that offers

CSE in middle schools in the country. In 2020, PJL secured an official partnership agreement with the Ministry of Education which clears a path for them to deliver CSE in any school across the island.

Program Structure and Duration

Each PJL educator (Jeune Leader) works full-time in a school during the academic year, facilitating weekly classroom sessions during what would otherwise be unused learning hours due to a lack of teachers in the education system. When not teaching, the educators facilitate extracurricular activities. The 4-year program runs throughout the school year during middle school (grades 6-9), ensuring continuity and sustained engagement with students and teachers.

Program Delivery

Programs are implemented by full-time, salaried young adult educators—graduates aged 18–25—who are extensively trained and mentored by PJL staff. Each Jeune Leader serves as an educator, counselor, and role model, providing consistent, trusted support to students while collaborating with teachers and parents.

Curriculum

PJL's curriculum uses scripted lesson plans to ensure CSE educators are delivering clear, evidence-based, non-biased information to students – and thereby avoiding misconceptions and controversy about what exactly they are teaching. The

curriculum consists of 27 dedicated, age-segmented scripted lessons that follow a logical sequential approach for the 108 total lessons throughout middle school (27 lessons per year, for four years). Each lesson lasts approximately one hour, and educators typically teach one lesson per grade per week throughout the school year. Lessons are participatory and age-appropriate. The curriculum includes a range of topics including puberty, gender equality, communication, emotional intelligence, consent, healthy relationships, and violence prevention. Lessons combine factual content with interactive exercises that promote reflection and personal agency.

Geography and Reach

As of the 2024–2025 school year, PJL supports 169 full-time educators teaching

in 153 partner schools across three regions—Vakinankaratra, Amoron'i Mania, and Haute Matsiatra—reaching over 55,600 adolescents annually. Since its founding, the organization has reached more than 200,000 students. Its growth has been driven by community demand: 100% of partner school administrations have requested the program's continuation, and parents increasingly advocate for expansion into neighboring communities. Since its inception, the organization has served over 400,000 young people and has been recognized nationally as a model for scalable, school-based CSE integrated with gender and life-skills education.

For more information, see: projectjeuneleader.org



OVERVIEW AND MISSION

Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) is a Madagascar-based nonprofit organization that works to ensure that every adolescent has the knowledge, confidence, and support to make informed choices about their bodies, relationships, and futures. The organization’s model centers on the idea that adolescents need not only accurate information, but also relatable role models who can accompany them in learning and reflection. PJL works through a youth-to-youth education model that places trained, salaried Jeunes Leaders (young leaders) in public middle schools across Madagascar. These educators—young Malagasy adults aged 18–25—are employed full-time to teach comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), provide individual counseling, and organize extracurricular activities that encourage civic participation, creativity, and collaboration. Through this structure, PJL strengthens the capacity of the education system to address adolescent needs holistically—linking learning about gender and sexuality with social and emotional development.

Approach to Shifting Adolescent Gender Norms

PJL’s approach to shifting gender norms begins with a recognition that adolescence is a formative period when attitudes toward gender, relationships, and power take shape. The organization works to cultivate new social expectations by engaging students, educators, families, and communities in a sustained process of learning, dialogue, and modeling of equitable behaviors. At the heart of PJL’s work is its in-school comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) program, delivered weekly by trained young adult educators who serve as consistent, trusted figures in students’ lives. Through participatory lessons and mentoring, these educators aim to create environments where boys and girls can think critically about the gendered expectations

that shape their daily experiences. CSE educators deliver classroom-based, scripted lessons that include discussions and role-plays that challenge stereotypes, encourage empathy, and provide information about puberty and sexual health. Laura Leeson, Director of Evaluation and Strategic Development explained that shifting adolescent norms around adolescent intimate relationships is a central goal of their work: “it goes back to their relationships, especially intimate partner relationships, that they’re both more equitable, and then, you know, there’s less violence and less acceptance of violence.”

Mentorship and role modeling are key in this process. Because PJL educators are themselves young men and women—close in age to their students but positioned as professionals—they demonstrate new

possibilities for gender relations and female leadership. Young male educators model positive masculinity and nonviolent communication, while young women educators embody leadership and public authority in contexts where women’s roles have often been confined to the private sphere. The daily visibility of these educators provides new role models to shape how students, parents, and teachers imagine what young people—especially young women—can aspire to become.

PJL’s also attempts to shift norms around who participates in classroom activities, as it emphasizes equitable participation of boys and girls in the interactive lessons. Educators are trained and supervised to ensure that both boys and girls contribute equally during lessons. The hope is that as these norms take hold in the school community, they will extend outward, influencing how young people interact with peers and family members in their daily lives.



THEORY OF CHANGE

How Does PJJ's Programming Shift Gender Norms?

PJJ's theory of change is grounded in six interlocking principles: rights-based, gender-transformative, participatory, locally owned, evidence-based, and culturally appropriate. Together, these principles reflect PJJ's belief that adolescents' health, confidence, and relationships can be strengthened when they are given sustained opportunities to learn, reflect, and practice new ways of relating to themselves and others. The program places young people at the center of their own development, while working through the broader social structures that shape their lives—particularly schools, families, and communities.

At the individual level, PJJ aims to foster self-awareness, confidence, and gender-equitable attitudes through its in-school comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) program. Weekly participatory lessons and small-group discussions are designed to impart accurate information while cultivating reflection, dialogue, and critical thinking about relationships, health, and gender. The curriculum is tightly scripted to ensure consistency and to prevent the spread of misinformation, but it leaves space for dialogue and student voice. Educators—young adults trained by PJJ—serve as consistent, trusted figures who model empathy, equity, and professionalism. Their presence helps adolescents connect what they learn to their daily lives, building emotional regulation, communication, and negotiation skills. Over time, these experiences are expected to strengthen self-efficacy and reshape norms surrounding sexuality, relationships, and gender-based violence.

At the family and community level, PJJ's work extends beyond the classroom to engage the social networks that influence adolescent behavior. Educators facilitate communication between students, parents, and teachers, helping to normalize conversations about puberty, relationships, and health. Through the CSE We Can Count On framework, PJJ works with parents, teachers, and local leaders to build understanding and reduce resistance to sexuality education. Rather than relying on abstract advocacy, PJJ emphasizes shared values and storytelling to build trust and community ownership. These efforts encourage parents to talk more openly with their children and to adopt more supportive attitudes toward adolescent development, while also reinforcing social norms that value respect, nonviolence, and gender equity.

At the institutional and policy level, PJJ integrates its model within Madagascar's education system, positioning the program as a credible, government-aligned initiative. Partnerships with the Ministry of Education, as well as with the Ministries of Health and Population, ensure that CSE is linked to health and social services and supported by school leadership. In addition

to PJJ-hired Educators, a second PJJ program-model engages government-hired teachers - specifically, teacher-trainees, young teachers, and recent teacher-training school graduates - as CSE educators who are trained, supervised, and embedded full-time in schools (with their salaries paid for by the Ministry of Education), creating a bridge between national policy and local implementation. This system-level integration helps ensure sustainability and scale.

Across these levels, PJJ envisions a cumulative process of change. In the short term, students gain knowledge, confidence, and equitable attitudes; they communicate better, express boundaries, and seek help when needed. In the longer term, these individual and relational shifts contribute to reductions in early and unintended pregnancies, sexual coercion, and gender-based violence, alongside improvements in mental health, relationships, and school climate.

Research and Program Evaluations

PJLs programming has been studied through a combination of internal monitoring, mixed-methods research, and independent academic evaluations. PJJ has collaborated with researchers from the University of Pittsburgh and Johns Hopkins University. A qualitative retrospective study published in the journal *Sex Education* (2025) examined the longer-term effects of PJJ's in-school comprehensive sexuality education program, interviewing former students two to four years after participation. Respondents reported that the program had influenced their knowledge, confidence, and relationships, with many describing lasting improvements in communication, empathy, and self-efficacy. Some also associated their participation with safer sexual behaviors and greater reflection about gender and relationships.

A mixed-methods study published in *PLOS ONE* (2024) used a Human Centered Design research approach to explore participants' perceptions of program impacts on populations beyond adolescents,

including schools, families, and communities. According to the study findings, the program has impacted the lives of students (e.g., increased academic motivation and confidence), their parents (e.g., strengthened family relationships and increased parental involvement in schools), their schools (e.g., increased perceived value of schools and teacher effectiveness), their communities (e.g., increased community connections), and impacted broader structural issues (e.g., improved equity and access to resources such as menstrual pads).

In addition to external research, PJJ conducts internal evaluations to monitor program implementation and outcomes. These efforts have assessed changes in students' knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy using established gender and norms measurement tools, and have also gathered feedback from teachers, parents, and school leaders to understand how the program affects school climate and community relationships. Additional research projects are underway, including a Randomized Control Trial study.

What is Working?

A central element of PJJ's success has been its formal partnership with Madagascar's Ministry of Education, which allows the organization to operate as part of the national school system rather than as a parallel program. Through this collaboration, PJJ's curriculum has been officially recognized and integrated into public middle schools, enabling the program to sustainably scale across the country. Additionally, PJJ, through its training and mentorship of the young leaders, has built the capacity of the school staff to build trusting relationships with students.

The curriculum design represents another promising practice. Delivered across grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 it provides an age-appropriate, developmentally sequenced learning experience that spans three formative years of adolescence. Lessons are built around participatory and reflective activities that deepen in complexity as students mature, revisiting themes such as puberty, child marriage, decision-making in intimate partner relationships, communication, gender equity, and violence prevention. This continuity allows adolescents to connect their evolving experiences with consistent, accurate information and guided reflection.

PJJ's use of tightly scripted lessons is also key, introduced in response to early program evaluations that revealed challenges educators faced when discussing sensitive topics. Some teachers felt discomfort or lacked confidence, occasionally providing inaccurate or incomplete information. The scripts now function as a professional

support tool, ensuring that educators deliver coherent, accurate, and interactive lessons while maintaining a participatory atmosphere. This approach enhances both quality and fidelity of implementation, while supporting young educators in building professional confidence.

Another important feature of the intervention is PJJ's approach to community engagement, which is grounded in empathy and collective responsibility. PJJ found that when parents are asked who should teach their children about puberty and reproductive health, they typically point to schools, while schools often say such discussions are the parents' responsibility. By reframing this tension and emphasizing shared values of community and compassion, PJJ wants adults to see adolescent well-being as a collective concern rather than an individual one. Framing CSE within a community context encourages parents and teachers to view early pregnancy, sexual violence, and adolescent health as issues that affect everyone—not just “other families.” This shared framing also alleviates the sense of burden that adults sometimes feel about addressing sensitive topics, instead distributing responsibility across families, schools, and trusted community allies.

In sum, strong government partnership, a multi-year age-appropriate curriculum, structured educator support, and a community-centered engagement strategy, can be implemented and sustained in ways that are both credible and contextually grounded.